4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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and postural forms expressive of respect cited earlier; the repeated hesitation to place others in embarrassing situations; the hesitation to tell others bad news so that "they will not feel sad" or will not have to dissemble (although more often the less delicate reason is the person's fear of embarrassing himself). Of a still different order is the uneasy affability that is expressed in the nervous giggling accompanying many face-to-face relationships and in the compulsive preoccupation with inconsequential or inoffensive topics while conversing with others. These responses appear to be either attempts to maintain minimal contact with others while jockeying to find out what they are really up to, or, in the negative sense, efforts to fulfill the minimum requirements of interaction while waiting (and hoping) for the contact to come to an end. And still different from all these is the affability associated with trying to make a good impression on others expressed in the constant concern with displaying good manners, with using pleasing or flattering words, with being a good host, and the like. Although this category is in many respects behaviorally similar to the "politeness" referred to above, it seems to differ from the latter motivationally in that it is concerned not with the state and comfort of others *per se*, but with ego's effect on others.

As described above in simple summary terms, these responses might appear quite ordinary and at certain times applicable to any group of human beings. However, what impresses the observer in Bang Chan is the insistence and constancy of their use. These are precisely the forms that the villagers choose in the vast majority of situations for expressing the degree and quality of contact that they feel toward others. That they are in fact social forms—stylized, often ritualized, modes of behaving—should not be overlooked. It is just this characteristic that engenders the theme underlying all the responses and which indeed sets the tone of most Thai interaction: that the relations between people should be friendly, genial, and correct, but need have little personal commitment or involvement. As will be seen below, it is this readiness to phrase most face-to-face contact in terms of social rituals while at the same time feeling little commitment to others that actually lies at the root of what has so often been called Thailand's "loosely structured social system."

Social Play

The first response mentioned above, the tendency to turn social situations into occasions for play, is probably one of the most common of all human tendencies (it is certainly one of the earliest), but one that strangely has received little attention in the psychological literature. The few writers who have expressed any interest in social play have tended to view it simply

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as a release mechanism from boredom or tension (Riesman and Bloomberg 1957, Roy 1959–1960), as a "healthy" escape from reality (Flugel 1954, Bateson 1954), or as a normal and desirable regression to childhood pleasures (Freud 1905 and 1928). Running through all these observations is the obvious Western bias that play somehow is divorced from, or a reaction to, the harsh facts of social reality.[6] On reflection, however, it is clear there is no theoretical necessity, either maturational or social psychological, for play to be limited to cathartic functions, or for regarding it as a less realistic or less mature psychological state than that which causes boredom, tension, escape, or regression. In fact, one might logically argue that the conditions which create the latter states are less realistic and immature because they represent retreats to forms of infantile masochism. Such questions of course belong to the realm of interpretive debate. The essential point is that in the process of learning to adapt to the social psychological realities of one's culture there is no inherent, ontogenetic requirement (other than that imposed by the peculiarities of one's culture) for human beings to renounce their motivations for play. Simply stated, having fun need not be so much a retreat from or defense against adult reality and responsibility as it is something to be sought after for its own sake.

The fundamental analytic issue here may well be whether play is a psychobiological "given" of the human animal, on the same order as hunger, sex, and other precultural needs, or a learned, secondary cultural

[6] Of these various interpretations, the most broadly conceived and carefully argued is Freud's, where play activities are linked theoretically to the interrelationships of the id, ego, and superego and the aims of the "pleasure principle." However, even here Freud was caught up in the Western cultural bias that only children, those who have not yet had to come fully to terms with social reality, could easily "afford" the luxury of play. This same cultural bias often appears at a totally different interpretive level in the rather crass pronouncements of journalists and travelers who, in writing about the Thai, refer to the "child-like" behavior of these people who spend so much time, energy, and money in having fun.

Radcliffe-Brown's famous essay on the "joking relationship" (1952) is of course a special sociological case of the "tension release" function of play. In a brief paper, Keesing (1960) lists some seven overlapping functions of play, but here too play is seen largely as divorced from "everyday 'reality' activities." Callois (1958) brings together valuable cross-cultural data in what is otherwise a classification of organized games.

Probably the most comprehensive study of play ever written is *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938; English translation 1950) by the late cultural historian, Johan Huizinga. Although Huizinga is concerned mainly with structured play activities (games of skill, chance, guessing games) and with the relationships between play and ceremonials, one of his observations is worth noting: "Nature, so our reasoning mind tells us, could just as easily given her children all those useful functions of discharging superabundant energy, of relaxing after exertion, of training for the demands of life, of compensating for unfulfilled longings, etc., in the form of purely mechanical exercises and reactions. But no, she gave us play, with its tension, its mirth, and its fun. Now this last element, the *fun* of playing, resists all analysis, all logical interpretation. As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental category. . . ."

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need. The problem is that we really do not know, although comparative data from primatology (Yerkes 1943, Kroeber 1948: 27–29 and 60–61) clearly suggest that play belongs to the former category. If this is indeed the case it would imply that play is subject to the same degree of cultural influence, channeling, and socialization as are hunger, sex, and aggression, but can no more be fully obliterated than can these needs. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that this reasoning is correct, then the compensatory "escape" and "regressive" functions attributed to play by the authors noted above would not be at all unreasonable: play might well come to serve as an escape from adult reality in the same way that food sometimes serves as an escape from sexual anxiety or sex from food anxiety (Holmberg 1950). However, the point is that these are not the primary or typical functions of these needs, but secondary and defensive ones; although significant, they hardly comprise the necessary conditions for their being. If this approach is valid, we would be considerably wiser in our present state of knowledge (the Protestant Ethic and its intellectual extensions notwithstanding) to direct our attention to identifying the varying forms of play from culture to culture rather than to dwell on its secondary, compensatory functions.

Whatever its ultimate motivational basis, there is no doubting either the spontaneity or ingenuousness with which Bang Chaners turn social situations into occasions for play. For the most part they seem prompted in these situations by the simple desire to have a good time rather than to affect others in a socially pointed way, that is, their humor is not typically aimed at being sarcastic, didactic, or even exhibitionistic, although the person who excels at being funny is quickly recognized as such and is to an extent admired.[7] There is, in the negative sense noted earlier, an element of interpersonal effect operating here: comedy is a technique which almost by definition reduces the potentiality for face-to-face conflict. However, the villagers' play seems aimed primarily at satisfying personalistic function: their *individual* needs for pleasure and amusement.

The forms that these play activities take are numerous.[8] Perhaps their

[7] In the more explicitly institutionalized forms of comedy—*likes* (folk dramatic shows) or newspaper and magazine cartoons—these aims do come into play and often assume extreme, sometimes even biting, proportions. However, this is the comparatively safe world of theatre and "literature." Among themselves, in the world of face-to-face contact, villagers are considerably more gentle (or less sophisticated) and do not focus explicitly on such purposes.

[8] We will be concerned primarily with the forms of play, not its content. For whatever reason, humor and comedy seem to be the last refuge of what is genuinely private in a culture. Intercultural translations may succeed in communicating the manifest content of another people's humor, but they so frequently miss its intent that the result is either perplexity or disappointment ("Yes, and what happens then?").

The dangers of trying to share humor interculturally were perhaps never brought home better than when I tried to get the villagers' reaction to a story that received